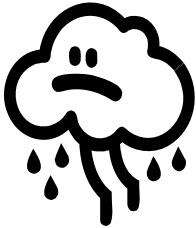


Department of Human Services

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MACOMB TWP.

Demon voice led mom to kill, psychiatrist says

Mother's ramblings described in court

September 7, 2007

BY AMBER HUNT

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

She waited on her porch for a car made of bones to come and take her to hell.

Instead, when sheriff's deputies arrived, she calmly went to jail, expecting the floor there to open up and deliver her to her fiery fate.

Advertisement

Were Jennifer Kukla's visions, as described to police and psychiatrists, fantasies fueled by psychotic delusions? Or were they proof she knew right from wrong when she slit the throats of her two young daughters?

That was the issue laid out for jurors on Day 2 of the first-degree murder trial against Kukla, who is charged in the Feb. 4 stabbing deaths of daughters Alexandra, 8, and Ashley, 5. Kukla, 30, of Macomb Township has pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity to the charges.

George Watson Jr., a psychiatrist with the state's Center for Forensic Psychiatry, said a deluded Kukla thought someone was coming for her children.

"She was killing them to prevent something worse from happening to them," he said. "She thought she was protecting her children in this misguided, delusional way."

Witnesses -- including Kukla's 22-year-old sister, Lauren Russell, whose testimony is to continue today -- described Kukla as confused and rambling in the hours leading up to the early morning slayings.

The night before, Kukla told friends and family she had been hypnotized, that she had previously killed people as part of a biker gang and that she was hearing voices.

"She was somewhat distraught and frantic," said Allen Vanderbossche, an ex-boyfriend who has known Kukla for at least five years. He said he drank beer with Kukla as he helped fix her furnace Feb. 3.

Said Russell, who helped clean Kukla's house because her sister thought social workers might try to take her daughters away: "I wasn't sure what she was talking about."

Vanderbossche said he dismissed much of the talk as drunken ramblings.

Watson was the first of three psychiatrists expected to testify that Kukla was legally insane when she killed the girls in their mobile home. A witness for the defense, Watson testified out of order during the prosecution's presentation because of scheduling conflicts.

Kukla told Watson that the voices she heard were benign at first, but grew more sinister as the day went on. In the end, a demonic voice told her: "Kill them, kill them, kill them," Watson testified.

But he acknowledged that Kukla's symptoms weren't textbook: She had no history of diagnosed mental illness. The psychotic break that led her to attack her daughters was "like a storm that blows in suddenly."

That comparison drew ire from Macomb County Assistant Prosecutor Bill Cataldo.

"We're not talking about a sudden storm here," he said. "We're talking about the deaths of two innocent children."

<http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=MACOMB+TWP.%3A+Demon+voice+led...> 9/7/2007

The mental deterioration that leads to a psychotic break usually takes days or weeks, not hours, Cataldo said.

"We're talking six hours here?" he asked Watson.

It's rare, Watson said, "but these things have been known to happen."

The trial is set to continue at 9 a.m. before Circuit Judge Edward Servitto.

Contact **AMBER HUNT** at 313-222-2708 or alhunt@freepress.com.

Find this article at:

<http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070907/NEWS04/709070364/1006>

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MOUNT CLEMENS -- A voice inside Jennifer Kukla's head told her to murder her children in order to save them from an even worse fate, a psychologist testified in court Thursday.

"In her misguided, deluded way, she thought she was protecting her children," Dr. George Watson of the Center for Forensic Psychology told a Macomb Circuit Court jury.

Watson testified he felt Kukla was legally insane on Feb. 4, when she allegedly fatally stabbed her two children, Alexandra, 8, and Ashley, 5, inside their Macomb Township trailer home.

Kukla told Watson during his evaluation in March that the voice she was hearing was benign at first -- "but as the evening went on, she said the nature of the voice became sinister and threatening," Watson said. "The voice told her that her children were in danger. It was the devil or a demon, telling her she had to kill them in order to prevent something worse happening to them."

After Kukla allegedly stabbed her children, along with three dogs and a pet mouse, she sat outside her trailer and "waited for a vehicle to take her to hell," Watson testified.

The car was made of bones, and had toes on it, Watson said.

Then, after police arrested her, "she thought she would go to the police station and an opening in the floor would drop her into hell," Watson said.

Throughout Thursday's proceedings, Kukla, 30, clutched herself and rocked back and forth, several times breaking into sobs.

Assistant Macomb County Prosecutor William Cataldo asked Watson during cross examination how he knew Kukla wasn't faking her psychosis. Cataldo also asked how, if Kukla was truly psychotic, she was able to function in society.

"She was an assistant manager at McDonald's," Cataldo said. "That's a job that requires a person to be able to function normally."

Watson said he reached his determination of Kukla's insanity based on tests he administered, along with other witnesses who saw Kukla apparently talking to someone who wasn't there.

You can reach George Hunter at (586) 468-7396 or ghunter@detnews.com.

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Witness: Demonic voices, delusions told mom to kill

Kukla briefly crazy before stabbing two young daughters, psychologist testifies

By Jameson Cook
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

A psychologist testified Thursday that Jennifer Kukla suffered a brief form of "psychosis" when she heard demonic voices and experienced delusional thoughts before stabbing to death her two young daughters.

Psychologist George Watson Jr. said in Macomb County Circuit Court that the night before the slayings Kukla began hearing voices that started as "benign" but gradually became evil and instructed her to kill Alexandra ("Alexa") 8, and Ashley, 5.

"The nature of the voice became sinister and threatening and began to say things about how the children are in danger and something was going to happen to them," Watson said. "She had to kill her children to prevent something worse from happening to them. There was an indication it was demonic source of some type, some type of demon was communicating this to her -- kill them, kill them.

"Her ability to tell the difference between reality and delusions and what the voices were saying were breaking down. ... She genuinely believed she was protecting her children, even though it is hard to understand what is worse than killing her children."

Watson took the stand for the defense in the murder vs. insanity trial of Kukla, 30, who brutally stabbed to death the children about 7:30 a.m. Sunday, Feb. 4, in her Macomb Township trailer.

Kukla claims insanity, saying that she started hearing "evil voices" instructing her to kill them about 12 hours before the slayings. If she is successful, she will be ordered to spend an indefinite period at a state psychiatric facility.

The prosecution concedes Kukla was mentally ill, but argues that she was not insane and should be convicted of premeditated murder, and spend the rest of her life in prison.

Assistant Macomb prosecutor William Cataldo implied through questioning that Kukla broke down and attacked her children from stresses of life, not short-term insanity.

Kukla's sister, Lauren Russell, took the stand for about 45 minutes before her testimony was cut off by Watson taking the stand due to scheduling matters. Russell, who called police about 6 p.m. Feb. 4 when she discovered Kukla had seriously harmed her children, is expected to continue testifying this morning in the downtown Mount Clemens courtroom.

Besides Russell, several others who talked to Kukla the day before the slayings testified about Kukla discussing strange things in a disjointed manner, such as being hypnotized and being forced to kill people in her past.

In stark contrast, several witnesses remarked that Kukla was a very good mother who kept good care of the two girls. They were well-behaved and well-kept despite their single mother's financial struggles.

Kukla's neighbor and friend, Rhonda Santos, who often watched the two children and whose

own two children often played with the girls, said on the stand Kukla was "an excellent mom."

"There was no doubt she loved the children," she said. "They were beautiful children. They were well-behaved. You couldn't ask for better children."

Santos said that on Feb. 2 she talked to Kukla at a bus stop. Kukla had called McDonald's, where she worked as an assistant manager, to tell them she would be late, and a manager told her to not come into work.

"She said she wanted to kill the kids, but I didn't think much of it," Santos said. "I say that kind of thing all the time without meaning it. I think it was just a statement made out of frustration."

Witnesses said Kukla had seemed depressed for a while but actually had seemed to be getting slightly better in very recent times.

It was also revealed Thursday that Kukla was sexually assaulted by her step-father, Edwin S. Snay, now 56, in 1992 when she was 15 years old. Snay pleaded guilty in Macomb Circuit Court to third-degree criminal sexual conduct. He was sentenced in January 1993 to four to 15 years in prison and spent more than five years in prison, according to Michigan Department of Corrections records.

Watson, of the state Center for Forensic Psychiatry, who was the first of three psychiatrists or psychologists expected to testify in the trial, said the molestation by Snay along with "a genetic predisposition" to mental illness due to her mother's mental issues and other factors in her youth meant "her chance of a psychotic disorder greatly increased."

"Of course she should have been in treatment," he said. "Her history shows she was traumatized. It leads to problems with depression and self-esteem."

Her mental illness of severe depression was affected by alcoholism, as several witnesses testified that Kukla had been drinking beer virtually every day for some time.

Watson acknowledged that Kukla's psychosis, which is equivalent to the legal definition of insanity, was uncommon in its brevity. Under cross-examination by Cataldo, he confirmed that the extremely temporary form of Kukla's psychosis occurs in less than 10 percent of the cases in Michigan in which someone is considered insane.

"It was like a sudden storm that comes in for a short time and leaves destruction in its aftermath," Watson said in one of his last remarks under direct questioning by defense attorney Steven Freers.

Cataldo followed moments later with a rhetorical question: "We're not talking about a sudden storm. We're talking about the death of two children."

Watson said Kukla quickly recovered from insanity to mere mental illness while housed in the Macomb County Jail, where she has received treatment for her mental disorders. He indicated that of about 1,100 forensic examinations of criminal defendants during his career, he concluded only 64 times -- 5.8 percent -- the defendant was insane at the time of the crime.

Psychosis, he said, is a substantial disorder of thought or mood, including voices and delusions.

In further cross-examination, Cataldo pointed out that Watson's report is partly based on subjective interpretation.

Watson said he did not believe Kukla exaggerated her claims about hearing voices since the remarks were backed by statements she made to other witnesses.

Witnesses testified that the night before the slayings Kukla was speaking in broken sentences and rambling. She claimed she was hypnotized and many years ago had been forced by

others to kill people, telling some of them a biker gang forced her.

Russell and an ex-boyfriend who has known her about five years testified that Kukla had never before talked about those things before.

Kukla made many of the comments while Russell and two others were helping her clean her trailer because she told Russell someone from Child Protective Services was coming to the trailer in the near future to inspect it. She was worried about losing the children.

"She stood up and said, 'I think I used to kill people,'" Russell said. "I said, 'What are you talking about?' "She said she wasn't sure if she ever was pregnant with Alexa and Ashley. ... I heard her say something about hurting someone else's kids. I heard her say she had eaten people before."

Russell testified she didn't challenge her older sister about the comments as she expected to talk to her about them later.

"I wasn't scared in any way," she said.

Russell, 22, who is married and has two children, had paid two of her friends -- Jessica Degg, 16, and Russell Rucker, 21 -- \$10 each to help her clean the trailer from about 7 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 3.

Russell, who works as a waitress, testified that her sister drank about 10 beers during the 3 1/2 hours she was interacting with her.

That afternoon, Kukla's ex-boyfriend, Alan Vanderbossche, who lived in a trailer in the same park, went to her home to fix her furnace.

He said Kukla also spoke about being hypnotized and forced to "do various things."

"She was frantic or distraught the whole time I saw her," he said. "She would skip from one thing to another while talking to her."

He said, however, he "didn't put much credence into it" because she was drinking beer at the time.

Vanderbossche said that she was worried about her children being taken away but "thought she'd settle down" because she had taken the "positive step" of cleaning her home.

Vanderbossche, who is not the father of either child, said that while the foursome cleaned the trailer, Alexa and Ashley stayed at his house and were watched by his 13-year-old daughter. He said he and Kukla remained friends after breaking up two to three years before.

Several witnesses said they noticed another unusual act by Kukla when she ran from her trailer to Vanderbossche's trailer a couple of hundreds yards away in bare feet and with no jacket despite bitter cold temperatures that night.

Freers' last question to Vanderbossche was about his comprehension of his former live-in girlfriend stabbing her daughters to death.

"There's no understanding of what happened," he said.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/090707/loc_kukla001.shtml

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Marshall: Father charged with child abuse

Trace Christenson, The Battle Creek Enquirer

Created: 9/6/2007 1:39:10 PM
Updated: 9/6/2007 1:40:39 PM

Marshall - The father of an 8-week-old boy is in jail today after police allege he shook the child Sunday.

Karl Moyer, 22, of Marshall is charged with first-degree child abuse related to injuries sustained by his son, Emmanuel Moyer.

The child, born July 10 to Moyer's girlfriend, was reported in critical condition Wednesday at Bronson Methodist Hospital in Kalamazoo.

The infant was injured Saturday between 5:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. at Spruce Tree Mobile Home Park, just outside Marshall at 14200 18 1/2-Mile Road in Marengo Township while Moyer was caring for him, officers of the Calhoun County Sheriff's Department said.

Karl Moyer first took the child to the nearby home of his girlfriend's mother and then to Oaklawn Hospital in Marshall.

The child was then transferred to Bronson Methodist Hospital in Kalamazoo, where doctors determined the injuries came from someone shaking the child and notified authorities Sunday.

Lt. Steve Eddy of the sheriff's department said following an investigation, Moyer was arrested Monday.

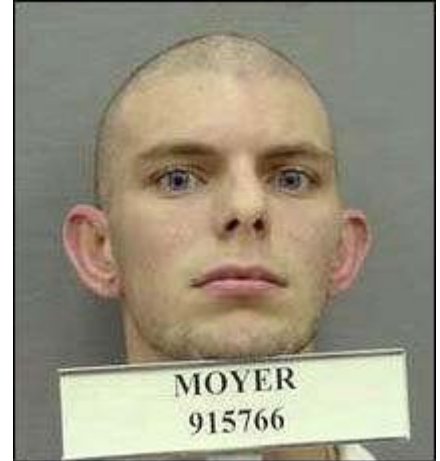
At his arraignment Tuesday, Moyer was ordered to appear for a preliminary examination on Sept. 17 and his bond was set at \$50,000.

If convicted, he faces up to 15 years in prison. Moyer also is charged with being an habitual offender because of a Feb. 7 resisting and obstructing conviction. That would increase his maximum sentence by 7 1/2 years.

According to records from the Michigan Department of Corrections, Moyer also has convictions in Hillsdale County for breaking and entering in 2005 and fourth-degree criminal sexual conduct in 2003 in Calhoun County.

Trace Christenson can be reached at 966-0685 or tchrist@battlecr.gannett.com.

Web Editor: [John Bumgardner](#), Assignment Desk



Michigan Department of Corrections photo of Moyer

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Kingsley man pleads guilty in son's death

By **VICTOR SKINNER**
vskinner@record-eagle.com

TRAVERSE CITY -- A Kingsley man avoided a potential life prison sentence for shaking his infant son to death when he struck a deal with prosecutors.

County prosecutor Alan Schneider will drop a first-degree murder charge against Anthony Curtis Bishop, 22, after he pleaded guilty in 13th Circuit Court Wednesday to two potential 15-year felonies, including involuntary manslaughter, court records show.

"The involuntary manslaughter and child abuse first-degree which he pled to fit the conduct and the circumstances surrounding the death," Schneider said, adding that the convictions would run concurrently.

Bishop told sheriff's officials he became frustrated with his crying son and shook the infant violently Feb. 2 while watching his two children at his Kingsley home, police reports show.

Bishop's wife was at work when the assault occurred. His other son, 2, was not injured, records show.

Emergency responders rushed Cole Curtis Bishop, 7 weeks, to Munson Medical Center, where he was stabilized before being flown to DeVos Children's Hospital in Grand Rapids, authorities said.

Curtis Bishop suffered subdural hematoma, or severe swelling near the brain, an injury consistent with Shaken Baby Syndrome. He died in Grand Rapids Feb. 4.

"I realized the mistake that I made as soon as my son made those faces and I held him in my arms ... that what I did was a big mistake," Bishop said in a recorded interview with detectives Feb. 3. "I was so scared."

Bishop was charged with murder Feb. 5 and has remained free on bond since his preliminary examination in April.

David Clark, Bishop's attorney, did not return a message seeking comment.

Circuit Court Judge Thomas Power is scheduled to sentence Bishop Sept. 28.

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Photos



Anthony Curtis Bishop

September 7, 2007**EDITORIAL**

Questions About a Rising Suicide Rate

A sharp jump in suicide rates among young Americans has left researchers puzzled as to the cause and wondering what lessons to draw from it. Some researchers are even suggesting that regulatory warnings about the safety of antidepressant drugs might have triggered the problem, leading doctors and their patients to shun potentially life-saving medications.

The new findings on suicide rates among 10- to 24-year-olds, reported yesterday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, are a startling reversal. From 1990 to 2003, the rate fell by more than 28 percent, from 9.48 to 6.78 suicides per 100,000 young people. From 2003 to 2004, the rate jumped back up to 7.32 per 100,000, an increase of 8 percent, the largest single-year rise in 15 years. Whether this is a short-lived increase or the start of a long-term upward trend is not yet clear.

The most provocative interpretation is that the upsurge was inadvertently caused by regulatory warnings. An article published in the American Journal of Psychiatry this week argued that, after American and European regulators issued warnings that antidepressants might increase the risk of suicide in young people, there was a decrease in antidepressant prescriptions for children and adolescents in the United States and the Netherlands — and an increase in suicide rates among youngsters in both countries. The article acknowledges that there was “only a small decrease” in prescription rates in this country but speculates that some of the most vulnerable youths may have been left untreated.

These conclusions will need careful scrutiny by other experts before they can be fully accepted. Federal scientists cautioned that their figures provide no information on what has caused the trend to reverse. Suicide is influenced by so many factors that it may be difficult to single out any one as the prime culprit.

It is possible that antidepressants may increase the risk of suicide in some depressed youngsters but save others from taking their own lives. Whatever the ultimate verdict, it is hard to fault regulators for raising a warning flag. Doctors and patients are still free to use the medications; they are simply on notice to pay attention to possible hazards for some youngsters.

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A tough decision ahead in Missaukee County

By Rick Charmoli, Cadillac News

LAKE CITY — Issues with balancing budgets is nothing new for many governmental entities but for the past couple years Missaukee County has been able to weather the storm.

This year, however, Missaukee County and some of its employees may not be able to do that.

During September's Board of Commissioners meeting Tuesday, the board is scheduled to talk about how the county can balance the current year's budget. Possibilities include cutting eight to 10 positions for the next fiscal year, according to Board Chair Susan Rogers.

"We have been using money each year in order to balance the budget and it comes from interest in the tax revolving fund. We have to stop doing that," she said. "We (the finance committee) decided that we needed to look at making major cuts in 2008."

Although increases in wages and benefits are part of the reason for the budget shortfall, Rogers said the unpredictability of another budget item also is to blame for the shortfall.

The child care fund is going to need \$175,000 more than what was budgeted for in this year's budget. Rogers said because of that, and increases in wages and benefits, there could be between a \$200,000 and \$300,000 budget deficit.

Probate Court Judge Charles Parsons said the child care fund is set up for in-home and out-of-home cost regarding children who are in the court's jurisdiction through abuse/neglect or juvenile delinquency.

Money can be used for counseling, foster care home placement, group home placement or secure placement.

Parsons said there is a budget for the costs but it is nearly impossible to know exactly how much money the fund will need each year.

"We do set up a budget but there is no actual way of knowing how many cases come before the court," he said. "If we have a case suddenly pop up with four children and the placement of four children, it is not something you can anticipate."

Although the potential cuts could impact eight to 10 county employees, Rogers said a majority of the cuts would most likely be reductions in hours. She also said one or two positions could be cut completely.

"We have already cut the nonessential. Now we are to the point of reducing people, hours of people or positions," Rogers said. "It isn't the fault of the child care fund totally, but it speeded things up."

Your local connection

September meeting

- What: Missaukee County Board of Commissioners September meeting.
- When: 10 a.m. Tuesday
- Where: Missaukee County Courthouse, 111 South Canal St.
- Why: During the meeting, commissioners are scheduled to discuss the possibility of making cuts in personnel. The possible cuts have the potential to impact eight to 10 Missaukee employees and services to residents.

rcharmoli@cadillacnews.com | 775-NEWS (6397)



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Investing in early childhood Initiative calls for better coordination of services

Friday, September 07, 2007

By Julie Mack

jmack@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8578

Getting kids a great start on life can pay off big.

Consider that:

- 80 percent of brain development occurs before age 5.
- Children who start school behind very often stay behind.
- Getting early-childhood services to kids brings a significant return on investment, from lowering juvenile delinquency rates to improving educational outcomes and a community's economic

vitality.

“You can't look at the

numbers for five minutes without reaching the conclusion we should do this,” speaker Jamie Vollmer told a Kalamazoo audience Thursday about the need to expand and coordinate early-childhood services.

Making early-childhood development a community priority is the mission of the Kalamazoo Great Start Collaborative, which got off the ground in early 2006 and released its first report Thursday at a breakfast that featured Vollmer, an Iowa businessman who now specializes in school/community relations.

While early-childhood services certainly exist in Kalamazoo County, Great Start officials say they tend to be patchwork and there's no guarantee that parents will take advantage of them.

“Babies are born and they go home and there's no (automatic) community intervention until they go to school,” said Dr. Donna Lou Ritter, a retired pediatrician and Great Start co-chairwoman.

But by then, a child's life can easily have been derailed. Putting it back on track becomes considerably more difficult.

What's needed, Ritter and others say, isn't necessarily new services, but rather expanding the capacity and access to current programs, coordinating various local efforts in a more vigorous fashion, and letting parents know what's available.

Great Start officials say the time is ripe for such an initiative. One reason is The Kalamazoo Promise, which has energized many in the community to help improve educational outcomes. Another is Michigan's stumbling economy and the growing realization that creating an educated, productive work force is key to economic vitality.

“I think we're close to a culture change in Kalamazoo County,” said Kristi Carambula, a Great Start board member and administrator of early-childhood programs for the Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency.

Great Start officials have spent the past year gathering baseline data and holding focus groups to assess

local needs. They are ready now to develop a strategic plan.

A report on the data was presented Thursday at a breakfast sponsored by the Kalamazoo Regional Chamber of Commerce. The event also featured Vollmer, who talked about how to effectively market Great Start.

“You have to get people to believe it’s in their self-interest to do this,” Vollmer said. “You have to connect the dots.”

The dots aren’t hard to connect, said Erika Oliver, who gathered the data for Great Start, pointing to the economic importance of investing in early-childhood services.

“If the question is, ‘What’s in it for me?’” she said, “then the answer is, ‘Everything.’”

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Child support may go private

Wayne County to open \$28-million program to bids

September 7, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Wayne County's chief circuit judge today will announce a plan to privatize most of the county's Friend of the Court system, which handles more than 20% of Michigan's child-support payments and has been criticized as inefficient, overburdened and mistake-prone.

Chief Judge Mary Beth Kelly said the company that wins the bid to run the \$28-million-a-year operation would be required to hire the 169 Friend of the Court employees affected by the change as well as to increase staffing by 33% in the first year.

Advertisement

The privatization plan would affect employees who handle a variety of duties, including enforcing court-ordered child-support payments but not referees or mediators.

The plan is certain to face stiff opposition from Council 25 of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), which represents the 169 Friend of the Court workers. AFSCME's contract with the county expired Sept. 1.

Companies expected to bid on the contract already run child-support systems in several states, including Tennessee, Texas and Illinois.

"They're experts at running the Friend of the Court," said Kelly, who oversees Friend of the Court.

County Executive Robert Ficano is taking a "very close look" at Kelly's plan because Friend of the Court routinely runs a deficit, his spokeswoman, Sharon Banks, said Thursday.

"We recognize the deep financial challenges and deficits the court has faced for many years," Ficano said in a statement released late Thursday.

"We also realize the level of service is a major concern for citizens. The action of the court to bid a contract must stipulate that all current FOC employees be absorbed and that higher efficiencies and accountability be required as part of the contract award."

Kelly denied that the change is union busting, though she acknowledged that the public employees moving to the private company might have to vote on whether to continue being part of a union.

"We're protecting union employees," Kelly said.

Kelly said she plans to issue a news release today announcing the "public-private partnership" for running the Friend of the Court and publish information on how to bid for the contract on the court's Web site, www.3rdcc.org.

Council 25 President Albert Garrett could not be reached Thursday, but he made his position clear in an Aug. 20 letter to Kelly:

"Lest there be any misunderstanding between us, please understand that AFSCME vehemently opposes these changes to contract languages, and unalterably opposes any attempt to privatize Friend of the Court jobs or other jobs within the court system."

Kelly said the privatization plan is not likely to affect pension benefits of Friend of the Court employees, but there are no guarantees on maintaining wage scales or benefits.

Three years ago, the Wayne County Circuit Court privatized the Friend of the Court call-in center after years of complaints from clients that no one answered the phones. The contract was awarded to Policy Studies Inc. based in Denver and has worked well, Kelly said.

Oakland County Friend of the Court Suzanne Hollyer, who worked for eight years at the Wayne County Friend of the Court and is president of

<http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=Child+support+may+go+private&expire=&...> 9/7/2007

Child support may go private

the Michigan Friend of the Court Association, agreed that Wayne's privatized call-in center works better than before. But she said the previous system failed because of staffing cuts.

"Anybody could do more with more staff, any department," Hollyer said. "It's always high volume and difficult work."

In Oakland County, about 150 Friend of the Court employees handle 58,000 active child-support cases, compared with Wayne County, where 242 employees deal with more than 300,000 cases.

One aspect of Michigan's child-support system already is privatized. In April 2005, Tier Technologies based in Reston, Va., took over the state's centralized system of collecting and disbursing child-support payments set through 57 local Friend of the Court offices.

Whoever wins the Wayne County contract would be expected to operate with the current \$28-million budget, all but about \$900,000 of which is federal money. States that do a good job setting and collecting court-ordered child support are rewarded with increased federal funding.

Increased collections should bring in more federal dollars that would allow whoever runs the Wayne County system to hire additional staff as required, Kelly said.

"It's collaboration; it's harnessing the expertise of the private sector for the benefit of the public sector," Kelly said.

Michael Ross, a medical doctor and president of the Family Rights Coalition of Michigan, frequently criticizes the Friend of the Court offices as money-making enterprises for the state at the expense of families.

"You've got a system that is fundamentally flawed. It should not exist to begin with," Ross said. "and now you're going to privatize it and make it a profit center for government?"

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

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Grandparents raising grandchildren

<http://www.michronicleonline.com/articlelive/articles/1608/1/Grandparents-raising-grandchildren/Page1.html>

By Paul Bridgewater

Paul Bridgewater

Published on 09/5/2007

There's nothing new about grandparents helping to raise and care for their grandchildren. In the past, several generations would live under one roof and the grandparents filled many roles, including full-time care when needed.

Grandparents raising grandchildren

There's nothing new about grandparents helping to raise and care for their grandchildren. In the past, several generations would live under one roof and the grandparents filled many roles, including full-time care when needed.

What is new, however, is that the number of grandparents raising grandchildren without the parents has doubled in the last 20 years. Grandparents parenting their grandchildren crosses all socioeconomic groups, geographic areas and ethnicities. In the 80s, 2.3 million children under 18 were living in the home of a grandparent, and now the number is 4 million and growing nationally. In Michigan, 114,472 children under the age of 18 live in their grandparents' households.

In 2000, an amendment to the Older Americans Act established the National Family Caregivers Act to provide funding for this important caregiving role – a role most people don't understand until it impacts them personally.

As a professional in the aging network, I would often address broad issues about grandparents raising grandchildren. But the reality of what this means set in when my grandson, Zachary, moved in with Juanita, my wife, and me six years ago.

Zach had been placed in foster care. Juanita is his biological grandmother, and neither one of us could imagine Zachary growing up without his family. We also couldn't imagine the adjustments and the joy that Zack, who is now 13, has brought us.

The reasons why this responsibility falls on the shoulders of responsible grandparents can be many. It could be because of divorce, unemployment, the physical or mental illness of the child's parents or the parents' drug or alcohol abuse. Sometimes it's because of the parents' abuse, neglect or abandonment of their children, the incarceration of the parents, the financial instability of the parents or family violence. And now, tragically, a high number of grandparents are outliving their children.

This newfound responsibility of raising grandchildren is not without difficulty and sacrifice. For some grandparents, health and stamina may be an issue. For others, new expenses bring economic difficulties, especially when living on a low, fixed income. For many, it's both, coupled with the fear of depleting all assets.

Providing care for grandchildren with health challenges or behavioral problems can become a challenge. Similarly, the grandparent may also be challenged because of his or her health and behavioral problems. There's also the risk of confusion as roles change.

Grandparents cannot be "grandparents" to the child who is under their care when they are parenting that child, and this may cause role confusion in the family and for the grandchild.

On the other hand, there are benefits and rewards that come with raising a grandchild. It's a chance to raise a child differently, to nurture family relationships, continue family histories and to receive love and companionship from a grandchild. It is clear that despite the problems, most grandparents derive satisfaction from acting as parents to their grandchildren. Providing care to their grandchildren helps some grandparent caregivers to feel young, stay active and experience a greater purpose for living.

At the Detroit Area Agency on Aging (DAAA), we see the need to address the problems that grandparents raising grandchildren face. In 2001, DAAA established the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren committee to start meeting the needs of grandparent caregivers in the community. Juanita Bridgewater has been chair of the committee for the past six years and the committee has increased the membership to 15 organizations (Adult Well Being Services, Bridging Communities - Bridging Generations, Catholic Social Services of Wayne County, Child Care Coordinating Council-4C, City of Detroit Senior Citizens Department, Detroit Area Agency on Aging, Detroit Public Library, Neighborhood Services Organization, Orchard Children Services, Southeastern Village, The Family Place, Wayne County Clerk's Office, Wayne County Department of Human Services, Wayne County Executive Office Community Outreach), presenting numerous events annually to strengthen the support group.

On Saturday, Sept. 8, the committee and the member organizations will celebrate National Grandparents Day at Cobo Conference Center.

This is not a new holiday. In 1978, President Jimmy Carter proclaimed that National Grandparents Day would be celebrated every year on the first Sunday after Labor Day. The impetus for a National Grandparents Day originated with Marian McQuade, a housewife in Fayette County, West Virginia whose primary motivation was lonely elderly in nursing homes.

The celebration at Cobo Conference Center on Saturday is for grandparents and grandchildren, and a celebration at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History on Sunday, Sept. 9, is for grandparents in general – both honoring the important role grandparents play in the lives of their grandchildren.

For more information about the DAAA Grandparents Raising Grandchildren committee or to RSVP for the Sept. 8 event, call (313) 446-4444.

Tune in to "The Senior Solution" on WGPR 107.5FM every Saturday morning at 10 am, hosted by Paul Bridgewater, president and CEO of the Detroit Area Agency on Aging.



Needy children get 6,200 pairs of shoes

Friday, September 07, 2007

By Beth Loechler

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Thousands of Grand Rapids children returned to school this week with new shoes and clothes, thanks to In the Image.

The Grand Rapids charity handed out 6,200 pairs of shoes and more than 10,000 outfits during the past three weeks.

Today marks the end of the annual Shoes Help Our Elementary Students, or SHOES, drive at In the Image, 1823 S. Division Ave. Director Paul Haagsman called the endeavor "the best ever."

In addition to giving away a record number of shoes, families got to select two new outfits for each eligible children.

The clothing bonus came as a result of an anonymous and "out of the blue" donation from a clothing distributor in New York City, Haagsman said.

He estimated the semitrailer load of clothing contained about 20,000 outfits, mostly for children.

"Most of the time, when you're poor, your surprises aren't all that good: 'Surprise!' The car won't start, 'Surprise!' The water heater broke ..." Haagsman said. "So having a good surprise was wonderful."

SHOES is a cooperative effort between Grand Rapids Public Schools and In the Image. Families from 18 of the neediest GRPS elementaries get vouchers for free shoes.

In the Image accepts cash donations and works with area retailers -- namely Payless Shoe Source and Kmart Stores this year -- to stock up on shoes all year, allowing the children to have a variety from which to choose when the giveaway begins in mid-August. Volunteers help with size and fit.

Another surprise this year was the amount of time the hundreds of volunteers put into the effort.

"We were able to keep the time spent waiting in line to a minimum. If you've ever had to hold the hand of a small child in line, especially when it is hot out, you know how important that aspect is," Haagsman said.

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LANSING -- Despite long hours of intense bargaining that stretched late into the night Thursday, lawmakers and Gov. Jennifer Granholm again failed to reach accord on solving the state's \$1.8 billion fiscal crisis, which almost certainly will involve a major tax increase.

And the Oct. 1 deadline for enacting a revenue and spending plan -- avoiding a government shutdown -- inched one day closer.

The Senate adjourned for the week around 10 p.m. The House stayed around for a while longer, but could not complete a deal without the Senate, which is not due back at the Capitol until Tuesday.

Throughout the day, there were indications that a consensus was close on a deal that would increase the state's income tax rate from 3.9 percent to 4.4 percent.

Additionally, there were hopes of winning agreement to allow voters to decide whether to increase the state's sales tax by a penny, to 7 cents on the dollar.

The sales tax increase would have replaced the income tax boost if approved by voters.

But in the end, as tempers got testy and nerves frayed, there was no resolution.

In an unprecedented move, most of the 38 senators -- Democrats and Republicans -- followed Granholm into the House chambers Thursday to coax the 110 representatives to take up the tax increase legislation.

Granholm and legislative leaders met off and on throughout the day trying to strike a deal that would enact an income tax hike, and then give voters the option on Nov. 6 of replacing that increase with a penny boost in the sales tax.

A hike in the income tax to 4.4 percent would cost a family of four with a household income of \$50,000 an additional \$184 a year.

Ratcheting up the sales tax to 7 cents on the dollar would put Michigan's rate among the highest in the nation, along with Tennessee, Mississippi, New Jersey and Rhode Island.

Thursday was the deadline for putting the sales tax proposal on the November ballot, because 60 days' notice is required by state law.

That next chance for a statewide vote apparently is Jan. 15, at the presidential primary.

An agreement broke down over technical issues on the passage of the income tax. Democrats and Republicans accused each other of being unwilling to close the deal.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester, said the Democratic-controlled House, which has been advocating a tax increase to wipe out the deficit, has been dragging its feet for weeks on the tax vote.

Senate Republicans want Democrats to take the tax plunge first.

"Everything's in place. The question is now: What are they going to do?" Bishop said.

House Speaker Andy Dillon, D-Redford Township, said House Democrats were prepared to stay all night to reach an agreement.

"We were prepared to stay and work through the night, but Senate Republicans walked away," Dillon said.

Dillon said House Democrats are now ready to pass their own plan for dealing with the budget problem, certain to include both tax increases and cuts, without Republican input.

"Everyone in the state of Michigan realizes we are going to raise taxes," Dillon said.

House Republicans said Dillon reneged on an agreement to pass a tax increase.

"We're out of time," said House Minority Leader Craig DeRoche, R-Nov. "The moves that were being made tonight can only be described as

an effort to shut down government by the Democrats."

The Associated Press contributed to this report. You can reach Mark Hornbeck at (313) 222-2470 or mhornbeck@detnews.com.

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Deadline passes with no tax deal from legislators

Friday, September 07, 2007

By Peter Luke

Press Bureau

LANSING -- Voters won't get a chance to raise the state sales tax in November after all, as frustrated lawmakers missed a key deadline and left for the weekend without agreement on a billion-dollar-plus tax plan for the state's 2008 budget.

Hours of back-room negotiations Thursday evening produced only a blame game between House Democrats and Senate Republicans over which side is responsible for months of budget delays.

Desperate for some progress is Gov. Jennifer Granholm, who aides say is increasingly concerned that time is running out for avoiding a disruption of government services when the fiscal year ends Sept. 30.

Senate Majority Leader Michael Bishop, R-Rochester, proposed putting a sales-tax rate hike from 6 percent to 7 percent -- \$1.3 billion worth -- on the Nov. 6 ballot, but he wants the House to act first. He said Democrats are paralyzed by "political fear that if they stick their necks out, there will be voter retribution. All we want them to do is to get this thing done."

House Speaker Andy Dillon, D-Redford, said since the current budget mess was created on a bipartisan basis, a controversial tax solution has to be bipartisan as well.

In addition to a sales tax increase, he wants the House and Senate to jointly craft tax bills so that the fingerprints of both parties are apparent to voters. Those tax bills, an income tax increase and a sales tax on some consumer services, would be a backup in case voters rejected a sales tax hike.

"I've been chasing Mike Bishop for six months now to get a deal, and I haven't gotten anywhere," Dillon said. "We need over a billion dollars. There's no question about that."

But Republicans are under pressure as well. GOP senators Thursday were targeted with automated phone calls urging them to block a tax increase. Sen. Valde Garcia, R-Howell, a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, said he and his colleagues are being urged to protect the Republican anti-tax "brand."

But he said tax critics outside the Legislature don't have to vote for the alternative: closing prisons, eliminating prescription drug coverage for Medicaid patients or slashing state aid to schools and universities.

Bishop still said progress was made behind the scenes Thursday, and that although the deadline for putting a sales tax question on the Nov. 6 ballot has passed, lawmakers could call a special election. House Democrats said the Jan. 15 presidential primary ballot was another option.

Granholm administration officials are increasingly worried budget talks will fail and the state won't have the money to pay bills come Oct. 1.

Treasurer Robert Kleine has short- and long-term debt payments to make on Oct. 1, but has no money yet to make them. Nearly half the school districts in the state won't have the funds to make payroll if the state misses a scheduled Oct. 22 state aid payment, said Budget Director Robert Emerson.

A coalition of education, municipal and social service groups charged this week that "chaos" would ensue

absent a budget deal.

"We will support legislators in their decision to raise taxes rather than make more cuts in programs and services," said Sharon Parks, vice president for public policy for the Michigan League of Human Services.

Richard Studley, of the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, says higher taxes should be a last resort after spending cuts for 2008 and beyond. And then, he said, any tax increase should be temporary.

He said the chamber opposes a sales-tax ballot issue, which he called a "big, fat, naked tax increase."

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